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DuSable

Park gets early funding

\$200,000 goes toward hashing out final plans for the long-languishing lakefront greenspace

By LYDIALYLE GIBSON

Staff Writer

Nearly two decades after Mayor Harold Washington gave DuSable Park a name—and a year and a half after environmental contractors scrubbed it clean of radioactive thorium—parks officials are getting down to details at three little untamed acres on the lakefront. Last week, Park District board members agreed to devote \$200,000 for the park's final design.

"Finally, we're in the capital budget for 2004," reported an elated Bob O'Neill, president of the Grant Park Advisory Council and a member of DuSable Park's citizen steering committee. "That's very, very good news. What this says is the Park District is taking the step toward actually building this park."

According to Park District spokesman Lisa Arizzi, officials there will invite consultants to submit proposals for the detailed design and construction documents that will guide its development. Already, local residents and DuSable Park well-wishers endorsed a conceptual design for the greenspace, which in addition to offering city dwellers a scrap of grass must also honor the memory of city founder Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable and provide a little water access at the lakefront mouth of the Chicago River.

"Now that everybody agrees on what it should look like, we're moving into the phase where we figure out the feasibility, the logistics of what to do with the park," Arizzi said.

Before the spring is out, according to Arizzi, Park District officials will choose a consulting firm to sketch out DuSable Park's final plans and draw up an estimate for its price tag. In the past, Park District officials have figured the cost of building the park at \$5 million or more.

"Probably within the next couple months, we'll know who's going to put together the final plans and construction documents," Arizzi said. "After that, it's still a community process. We'll be meeting with the community to talk about what's feasible in the conceptual plan. If something's not feasible, we'll say, 'Here's what we can do.' And after that, we'll be talking about money."

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last fall, the Park District's conceptual design for DuSable Park calls for a greenspace split between manicured gardens and ragged wilderness. Walking paths would encircle the park, and a sloping, sown water's edge would allow recreationalists to get their feet wet. A walkway at the park's southeasterly corner would be built close enough to the water that it would flood from time to time.

Surveying DuSable Park's domain from its entrances at Lake Shore Drive would stand a monument to du Sable, the city's seldom-sung father and first settler, a black fur trader, farmer,

and businessman who planted his homestead here 30 years before the city's incorporation in 1833. Chiseled by famed sculptor Martin Puryear, the monument will be accompanied by a little explanation of du Sable's life and achievements.

"A lot of the community work is done already," O'Neill said. "So that should keep the cost of building the park down, because a lot of us volunteered to put our time into getting that consensus for the conceptual design of the park."

Arizzi insisted she couldn't guess just when DuSable Park would be finished, but said locals could look forward to hearing from Park District consultants and meeting to talk about their plans in the coming months.



Chicago Journal file photo

A year and a half after the thorium came out, DuSable Park snagged \$200,000 in Park District funds for a final design.

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